

Appl. No. : 10/665,693
Filed : September 17, 2003

REMARKS

Claims 1-23 are currently pending

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Matsunaga et al. (2003/0053893). Applicants respectfully disagree that Claims 1-9 are anticipated by Matsunaga et al. and traverse this rejection. Matsunaga et al. do not disclose all of the recited elements in independent Claim 1. The Examiner contends that “Matsunaga et al. disclose a first substrate handling chamber 12, front docking port 50, robot arm 10, rear substrate handling chamber 41,” and a buffer station 101. Applicants submit that if Matsunaga et al.’s chamber 11 (reference numeral 12 is the housing of chamber 11) serves as the recited first substrate handling chamber, Matsunaga et al. do not disclose or suggest a front docking port located on an outside surface of the first substrate handling chamber, as recited in Claim 1. As shown in Figures 1 and 5 of Matsunaga et al., the “pod opener” 50 is not on an outside surface of the chamber 11, but rather on an outside surface of chamber 40.

Applicants respectfully submit that if Matsunaga et al.’s chamber 40 corresponds to the recited first substrate handling chamber, Matsunaga et al. do not disclose or suggest a buffer station adjacent the first substrate handling chamber, as recited in Claim 1. As shown in Figure 5 of Matsunaga et al., the buffer chamber 101 is not adjacent chamber 40, but rather is adjacent chamber 11, which does not have a front docking port located on an outside surface.

Claim 1 is therefore patentable as it is not anticipated by Matsunaga et al. Claims 2-9, which depend from and include all of the limitations of Claim 1, are also patentable over Matsunaga et al. Furthermore, each of the dependent claims recites additional features of particular utility.

Claims 14-23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Yonemitsu et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,143,083. Applicants respectfully disagree that Claims 14-23 are anticipated by Yonemitsu et al. and traverse this rejection. Yonemitsu et al. do not disclose all of the recited elements in independent Claim 14.

The Examiner contends that “Yonemitsu et al. disclose a first substrate handling chamber 100, 500, front docking port 13, 200, robot arm 66, 20, and a buffer station having a rack 40.”

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However, Yonemitsu et al. do not disclose or suggest a purgeable buffer station joined with and adjacent the substrate handling chamber, as recited in independent Claim 14. The Examiner contends that Yonemitsu et al. disclose “a load lock that can function as a buffer station.” Applicants assume that the “load lock” to which the Examiner refers is the load lock module 300 in which Figure 4 of Yonemitsu et al. shows the wafer holder 40. Applicants respectfully submit that the Yonemitsu et al. load lock module 300 is not joined with and adjacent the substrate handling chamber. The Examiner points to elements 100 and 500 as the substrate handling chamber. Applicants submit that element 500 cannot be the recited substrate handling chamber because the front docking port 13 is not located on an outside surface of element 500 and the “atmospheric pressure section 200” is not a front docking port capable of mating with a cassette. The Examiner also points to “the front section 100” as the substrate handling chamber. However, if element 100 is the substrate handling chamber, Applicants submit that Yonemitsu et al. do not disclose or suggest a purgeable buffer station joined with and adjacent the front section 100. As shown in Figure 4 of Yonemitsu et al., the load lock module 300 (which the Examiner contends is capable as functioning as a buffer station) is not joined with and adjacent the front section 100, but rather is within the front section 100.

Thus, even if a load lock can function as a buffer station, the reference does not meet the claim language. Claim 14 recites a number of interrelationships among the elements, and the Examiner may not apply one interpretation of the reference to meet one limitation and another interpretation of the reference to meet another limitation. Rather, one consistent interpretation of the reference must simultaneously meet all of the claim limitations in order for the reference to anticipate.

Claim 14 is therefore patentable as it is not anticipated by Yonemitsu et al. Claims 15-23, which depend from and include all of the limitations of Claim 14, are also patentable over Yonemitsu et al. Furthermore, each of the dependent claims recites additional features of particular utility.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 10-18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Matsunaga et al. in view of Ozawa et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,810,538. As discussed above with respect to

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Claim 1, Matsunaga et al. do not disclose or suggest front docking port located on an outside surface of the first substrate handling chamber nor do Matsumaga et al. disclose or suggest a buffer station adjacent the first substrate handling chamber. Independent Claims 10 and 14 also recite these elements that are not disclosed or suggested by Matsunaga et al. Ozawa et al. do not supply the deficiencies pf Matsunaga et al. Thus, the asserted combination of Matsunaga et al. and Ozawa et al. does not meet the limitations of Claim 10 or 14, let along the unique combinations of limitations of Claims 11-13 and 15-23, which depend from and include all of the limitations of Claim 10 or 14. Claims 10-18 are therefore patentable over Matsunaga et al. and Ozawa et al., either alone or in combination.

Conclusion

Applicants respectfully submit that all of the pending claims are patentably distinguishable over the prior art of record. The cited references, either alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention.

Please charge any additional fees, including any fees for additional extension of time, or credit overpayment to Deposit Account No. 11-1410.

Respectfully submitted,

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AMEND

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